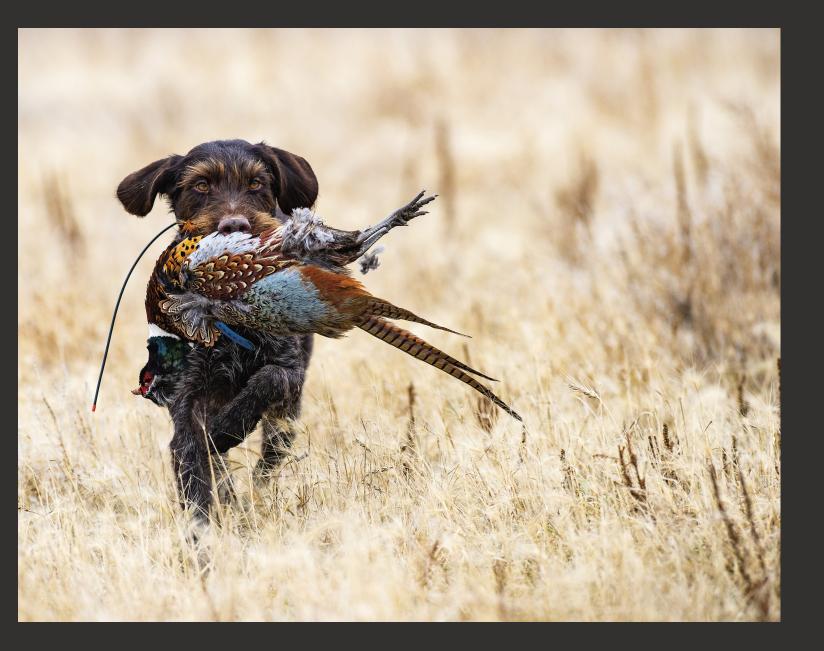
THE FINDERS AND THE FETCHERS....

Like ice cream, bird dogs come in a variety of flavors.

Of the roughly 30 "sporting" breeds, some specialize in pointing at birds—coming to a complete stop upon smelling a live grouse, pheasant, or other upland species and aiming its snout toward the scent source, often with one paw slightly raised. Others are masters at retrieving birds—usually swimming after a downed duck or goose, or finding a dropped pheasant or grouse in the field, and returning the bird to the hunter. >>

Labrador retriever

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Opposite page: German wirehair with a rooster STEVE OEHLENSCHLAGER

Left: German shorthair locks up on a Hungarian partridge. KEITH R. CROWLEY

Below right: Brittany pointing a pheasant KEITH R. CROWLEY

Below left: English setter with sharp-tailed grouse JACK BALLARD





Most sporting dogs aren't limited to just one skill, either. Some pointing breeds also retrieve quite well, while all retrievers flush upland birds and some, like pointing Labs, have even been bred to point.

Regardless of breed, they're all wonderful, with a sense of smell and other superpowers we humans can't begin to fathom. For example, how can a dog that is retrieving a downed bird stop and point another bird many yards away, as if the scent of the bird in its mouth doesn't exist? And how can a dog know that a bird flying away, apparently unharmed, actually has been hit with a pellet or two and should be followed, because it will soon drop to the ground? I've stantly on the search for birds. When she gets a noseful of scent she seen both happen more than once.

I started with a Labrador retriever more than 40 years ago, and and flush the hiding bird. now I'm on my fourth: a 13-year-old "British" black Lab named

Bailey. She wasn't born in the British Isles but her forebears were, dogs with names like Turramurra Teal and Lochmuir Bonnie. She is a consummate waterfowl retriever, a strong swimmer who sits patiently at my side in the blind scanning the sky for ducks and geese.

I also own a 7-year-old Brittany named Tess, my fifth of that breed. Her ancestors came here from France a century ago, where they were once called "poachers' dogs" because they were small and easily concealed under an illegal hunter's coat. Like all pointing dogs, Tess runs like a rocket when turned loose in the field, conscreeches to a halt and stands stone-still, waiting for me to walk up

Knowing how much dogs love to chase things, I marvel at this stop-

and-wait trait that's been bred into pointing breeds—which include German wirehairs, German shorthairs, Weimaraners, Vizslas, English and Irish setters, English pointers, and wire-haired pointing griffons.

It doesn't always work out that way, though. I had one quirky Brittany named Ollie who might point perfectly all day and then suddenly decide to nose a bird into the air, well before I got within shooting range, for reasons of his own. Ollie was most lovable and I forgave his occasional transgressions.

Bailey, too, likes hunting upland birds, but in the field she takes

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the flushing approach. Once on the trail of a pheasant or grouse, she pursues it like a bloodhound, nose to the ground, never hesitating for a moment until the bird is in the air. Tess finds Bailey's failure to point and hold sinful and annoying, so I don't hunt the two together.

Hunting technique is not the only thing that separates the pointers and retrievers I've owned. Bailey, like most Labs, has never seen a meal she didn't like. She attacks her dog food as if she's starving, even though she could stand to lose a pound or two. Tess, on the other hand, is an indifferent eater and needs to be tempted with canned food or treats to maintain a healthy weight.

Pointers and retrievers are both intense and focused in the field because those traits have been bred into them for hundreds of years. But they make fine pets, too. The old idea that hunting dogs should

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Above: Yellow Labrador in a shallow marsh **KEITH R. CROWLEY**

Right: Black Labrador with a drake mallard DOUG TATE





Left: Springer spaniel with a chukar (like other flushing breeds, springers are also bred to retrieve). **GARY KRAMER**

Below: Golden retriever chasing a rooster DENVER BRYAN



be kenneled outdoors so that they don't become "soft" has long been disproved. These days even field trial champions live indoors and actually perform better because they form a stronger bond with part of our family.

ers. If you share your home with a Labrador for any length of time, you'll soon know why it's America's most popular dog. Bailey generally stays out from underfoot and will happily nap the afternoon away. Tess, on the other hand, is a busy little dog in constant need of stimulation. She's either monitoring the yard for bunnies and songbirds or demanding to be reminded how wonderful she is by flopping on her back and asking for a belly rub. Bailey likes being patted on

the head or getting scratched behind her ears, but she's perfectly content just to lie nearby when I'm working at my computer.

Pointers have been bred to cover ground quickly, searching out their owners. More than anything, dogs want to please us and be a bird scent with great drive and energy. Some pointers make only so-so retrievers because they're more interested in looking for live In my experience, retrievers are a bit more laid-back than point- birds than in searching for those already shot. Others make fine retrievers; it's hard to generalize because there is individual variation in every breed.

> As is the case with other retrievers such as Chesapeakes and goldens, my Labs have been keen upland dogs as well as waterfowl retrievers, and all my Brittanys have retrieved well on land or water. Of course, late-season waterfowl hunting in Montana is a job best suited to breeds with thick, water-resistant coats. When Bailey and I

head to the river on icy December mornings, Tess stays in her kennel.

Like all Labs, Bailey has a strong desire to bring me things—tennis balls, pine cones, old bones, or anything else she can pick up and carry. She has a "soft" mouth and scarcely ruffles a feather on birds fully intact. On one long retrieve for a pheasant I'd dropped, he she retrieves. Once, when she was a pup, she ran up the hill near my house at dusk and began to bark. I followed, straining to see through the fading light as she came prancing toward me with something black and white in her mouth. Even before the scent hit, I knew what it was: a half-grown skunk from a family I had seen a few days earlier. I panicked and ran for the house. Bailey then dropped her little friend, which scurried away none the worse for wear.

Having tangled with many sharp-spurred rooster pheasants, Tess is not as gentle as Bailey when it comes to retrieving wounded

birds. She usually gives them a quick bite on the head to make sure they won't give her any guff while she's retrieving them. But I once had a Brittany named Groucho who often brought pheasants back found the bird and started back to me with it in his mouth. Somewhere along the way he put it down to adjust his grip. Apparently, the rooster was barely wounded, for it promptly flew away. Groucho came back looking apologetic as if to say, "Sorry, Dad, I guess we're doing catch-and-release today."

Regardless of whether you choose a pointer or retriever, you can look forward to many years of fun and laughter. And yes, some tears as well, because our dogs inevitably leave us far too soon. It's the price we pay for their unconditional love and loyalty. As Rudyard Kipling

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Retrieving breeds

Clockwise from top left:

> Labrador retriever LON LAUBER

Golden retriever GARY KRAMER

Chesapeake Bay retriever KERRIE TEE

Standard poodle TEEMU TRETJAKOV









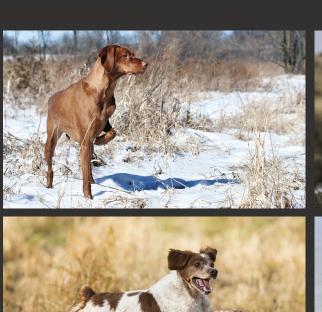


The author with his Brittany, Tess, and Labrador retriever, Bailey. THOM BRIDGE

wrote, "Brothers and sisters I bid you beware, of giving your heart to a dog to tear."

When the time comes when you must say goodbye to your old friend, as I will have to do with Bailey before many more years pass, there is only one cure for the hole in your heart: another furry bundle of joy with puppy breath. And if you can't decide between a pointer or a retriever, why not one of each? 🐀

You can look forward to many years of fun and laughter. And yes, some tears as well, because our dogs inevitably leave us far too soon.









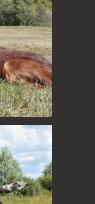














Clockwise from top left:

Vizsla **BRIAN GUEST**

English setter JESS MCGLOTHLIN

Wire-haired pointing griffon CAT SIMPSON

Brittany LISA WRIGHT

Irish setters MIKE FOKKE

German wire-haired pointer NATALLIA YAUMENENKA

English pointer

JELENA SAFRONOVA

Weimaraner ARTEM BURDUK

German short-haired pointer WAYNE HUGHES

French Brittany STEVE OEHLENSCHLAGER

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